

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



[The Editor is not responsible for opinions expressed in this Department.]

DEAR EDITOR: One of the curious vagaries of the human mind is the frequency under circumstances of great gravity or excitement that it is attracted by what appears to be a relatively unimportant thing.

If Robert Burns had been minding the sermon, we would not have enjoyed,—

“Oh, wad some power the giftie gie us
To see oursels as ithers see us.”

Apropos of this well-known fact I must confess that over and above all the serious subjects brought up for consideration at the International Congress in Buffalo, an incidental remark made by Miss Isla Stewart, one of our English delegates, has persisted in giving me more to think about than any other one thing. Miss Stewart in discussing St. Bartholomew's League made the remark that “American nurses were so much taken up with work to the exclusion of play.” Miss Stewart may have expressed herself somewhat differently, but that was her idea as I understood it. I hastened at that time to assure our visitor that we did relax sometimes, but thinking it over quietly since I am convinced Miss Stewart was right, and that we do take ourselves too seriously.

The eager, over-anxious faces seen among us, both in private and hospital nurses, seem a fairly good indication of the truth of it; the numbers of nurses who must needs have long leaves of absence for change of climate and rest still further prove it, and the numbers of nurses who are saying to one another “What can we do if we must give up nursing?” would seem to establish the fact that the nurse as well as Jack is made dull by “all work and no play.”

I have been guilty of driving an immense amount of work through my own Alumnae Society in the days when I was one of its officers, and yet our society has always had its social side and spent a lot of time in good, soulful visiting, but I confess that when I see some of the programmes of ambitious young organizations I am appalled at the gravity and enormity of the work laid out for a year, unrelieved by even so mild a dissipation as an afternoon tea or a kaffee klatch, and I feel very strongly that they are making a serious mistake in leaving out provision for rational amusement and social intercourse. I am making no plea for that odious creature, the silly, overdressed nurse striving to be thought a worldly society woman,—she ought to be obliterated,—but for the great number of excellent women who drift into a colorless existence without enthusiasms or any interests outside their work.

If either private or hospital nurses could command the home life which is available for doctors and teachers, they might devote all their spare time to improving their minds. Going back to our pupil-nurse days, was not the “spread” simply an instinctive expression of our craving for social life? It has long been my opinion that the young women who have had the right kind

of social training at home make the most satisfactory nurses, and I have a tremendous interrogation-point in my mind when I am done reading some of the ponderous programmes we have devised for our own punishment.

I hope you do not mind my saying that I think we have neglected our JOURNAL in that one point. We have been so absorbed in its serious side that we have lost sight of chances for improving our spirits as well as our work.

It seems to me in the light of our long experiences we might put up an occasional guide-post to happier lives for the coming generations of nurses. We all know that the humorous side of our work has very often carried us over its most difficult spots. As Robert Louis Stevenson so well expressed it, "A sense of humor will often carry a woman through when religion fails." I expect several good ladies will wish to take me to task for this outbreak of frivolity, but if it adds to the gaiety of the occasion, let us have their objections by all means.

ISABEL McISAAC.

DEAR EDITOR: When we consider the large number of people suffering from mental diseases, it is manifest that in order to effect a cure or any alleviation of their sad condition they must be cared for by those trained for the work. This fact has long been recognized, therefore training-schools have been established in our large institutions for the insane with a view to making the nurse assist the doctor in a more intelligent manner. Yet a nurse who has trained for that work is not looked upon by nurses otherwise trained as a graduate nurse, although she has been taught from the same text-books and passed the same examinations. Her sister nurse, who, may be, has been trained in a small child's hospital of say twenty or thirty beds, will look upon a mental nurse as "not a graduate, only trained in an insane institution." If a mental nurse wishes to enter a well-conducted hospital for a post-graduate course, she will be told that her diploma cannot be accepted. Why do nurses take post-graduate courses? Because they feel the necessity of doing so and need the knowledge gained by so doing; they may have graduated years ago and must keep up with the times, or their training, if recent, may have lacked some particular branch of nursing. Now a mental nurse has been trained in her particular branch and also feels a need of taking a course in another branch. Why this demarcation?

Then mental nurses are told that they have not had experience in "physical diseases." Insane people are sick and have to be cared for the same as the sane.

A nurse from a child's hospital has had no experience with adults, one from a gynecological hospital is confined to the one set of operations, etc., etc. This is an age of specializing. Now, instead of sitting at home and accepting this professional obliteration, I believe in trying to remedy it. In State organization mental nurses must not be passive. They constitute a large number and they must demand the same privileges with other nurses. They must make the difference known between the trained nurses for the insane and the attendants for the insane. To the majority of people the terms are synonymous, which is most unfortunate.

First, I would place all training-schools in our large institutions for the insane in the hands of a graduate of a large general hospital, and have the training on exactly the same footing, or have a woman who has had training in both if possible. The whole thing lies in the head, as everyone knows. I would not appoint a person merely because of her long service in the institution; she might have been in the institution for years in a subordinate position and be